

Scruggs, one of the founders of the memorial, said yesterday that he extended the invitation because he thinks McNamara "should really look and see the people who went—see their faces and shake their hands. I think it would help him, and it would certainly help the country."

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Preston Honored

■ Family and friends of Lewis Preston converged on the Brazilian Embassy last night to see the ailing World Bank official receive the Insignia of the Grand Officer of the Order of the Southern Cross, the highest honor bestowed upon a foreigner by the Brazilian government.

Preston, who is well known for his ties to the South African apartheid regime, dates back more than 20 years to his former head of the New York City financial district.

McNamara's Regrets

■ Vocal Vietnam veterans activist Jan Scruggs threw down the gantlet yesterday to Robert McNamara, whose new book is a harsh *mea culpa* for the Vietnam War, by inviting him to speak at a service at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on Memorial Day. But McNamara told The Post late yesterday that he won't be there.

"I have a commitment to be in Japan and I can't break it," said McNamara. The author of "In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam" added, however, that he'd have had no problem facing the crowd of veterans. "I'm not sure what I could add to the book, but I'm sure some people won't have read the book, so yes, I would have done it."